

REMARKS

In view of the above amendments and following remarks, reconsideration and further examination are requested.

The specification and abstract have been reviewed and revised to make editorial changes thereto and generally improve the form thereof, and a substitute specification and abstract are provided. No new matter has been added by the substitute specification and abstract.

Claims 1-31 have been canceled and claims 32-62 have been added.

The instant invention pertains to a method for producing a belt for use in an image forming apparatus. The belt includes a release layer, an elastic layer on the release layer, and a supporting layer on the elastic layer. In producing the belt, the release layer is provided on a die surface and baked, the elastic layer is applied on the release layer and baked, and the supporting layer is provided on the elastic layer and baked. Such a belt and method of production are generally known in the art but suffer from a drawback in that the supporting layer of the belt is often of an uneven thickness, which results in a problem in that when toner is applied to a recording medium uneven pressure is applied to the recording medium such that recording quality may lessen. Applicants have addressed and resolved this drawback by providing a unique method for manufacturing the belt. Specifically, unevenness of the supporting layer is removed.

Former claim 1 and new claim 32 are believed to be representative of Applicants' inventive method.

Claims 1, 3 and 4 were rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over JP '675, and claim 2 was rejected under 35 U.S.C. § 103(a) as being unpatentable over JP '675 in view of Uehara et al. These rejections are respectfully traversed, and the relied-upon references are not applicable with regard to the newly added claims for the following reasons.

In rejecting claim 1 as being unpatentable over JP '675, the Examiner recognized that this reference fails to disclose the step of removing unevenness of the supporting layer, and thus concluded that it would have been obvious to one having ordinary skill in the art to have done so because it is well known that smooth surfaces are beneficial in an attempt to achieve desired

results. As an example, the Examiner stated that a smoother layer will increase a contact area of the belt with a roller, thereby reducing belt slippage. However, a smoother layer may actually reduce contact area with the roller and thereby increase slippage. That is, greater friction exists between roughened surfaces as compared with smooth surfaces. There is no indication in JP '675 that the supporting layer needs to have unevenness thereof removed for any reason. Accordingly, a prima facie case of obviousness has not been established for claim 1 based on JP '675 alone, whereby claim 32 is not obvious over JP '675 such that claims 32-62 are allowable over this reference.

Additionally, a prima facie case of obviousness is not established by combining the teachings of JP '675 and Uehara et al. In this regard, even though Uehara et al. discloses polishing of a belt surface, the surface that is polished is not a surface of a supporting layer, but is rather a surface of the layer that is to come into contact with toner to be applied. That is, with regard to Fig. 2, for example, base film 10a is the supporting layer while layer or lamination 10c is the layer that is polished. As such, were JP '675 modified in view of Uehara et al., the surface of JP '675 that would be polished would be the release layer thereof (i.e. the layer that is to apply toner) and not the supporting layer. Thus, combining the teachings of JP '675 and Uehara et al. would not result in **removing unevenness of a supporting layer**, as required by claim 32, whereby claims 32-62 are also allowable over this combination of references.

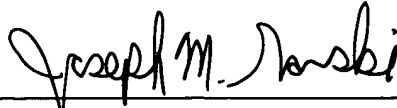
In view of the above amendments and remarks, it is respectfully submitted that the present application is in condition for allowance and an early Notice of Allowance is earnestly solicited.

Please note that appropriate action will be taken in reply to the provisional obviousness-type double patenting rejection once claims of the instant application are indicated by the Examiner to otherwise be allowable.

If after reviewing this Amendment, the Examiner believes that any issues remain which must be resolved before the application can be passed to issue, the Examiner is invited to contact the Applicants' undersigned representative by telephone to resolve such issues.

Respectfully submitted,

Tadafumi SHIMIZU et al.

By: 
Joseph M. Gorski
Registration No. 46,500
Attorney for Applicants

JMG/nka
Washington, D.C. 20006-1021
Telephone (202) 721-8200
Facsimile (202) 721-8250
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